



Managing Thoughts, Emotions & Behaviors

This guide was created to help you better manage overwhelming thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Whether you're struggling with anxiety, intrusive thoughts, emotional reactivity, or compulsive urges, these tools offer practical ways to regain control and feel more grounded. Each section is organized by theme—cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and grounding—to help you easily find what you need. With consistent use, these tools can help retrain your brain and support long-term emotional resilience. Keep it nearby and return to it as often as needed.

Cognitive Regulation: Managing Thoughts

Cognitive regulation is your ability to take control of the thoughts that race, repeat, or spiral in your mind. When thoughts go unchecked, they often fuel anxiety, perfectionism, obsessive thinking, and compulsive behavior. These tools help you slow down your thinking, gain perspective, and respond instead of react.

1. Thought Labeling

- WHAT IS IT: Instead of getting swept up in a thought, name what it is: *"This is a fear."* *"This is a memory."* *"This is a prediction."*
- WHY IT HELPS: Labeling gives you space between the thought and your identity. You become the observer of your thoughts—not the victim of them.
- EXAMPLE: You think, *"I'm going to mess this up."* Label it: *"This is a worry, not a fact."* That alone helps reduce its power.

2. Cognitive Reframing

- WHAT IS IT: Challenge the thought. Ask: *Is this true? Is this helpful? Is there another way to look at it?*
- WHY IT HELPS: It teaches your brain to stop treating every thought as reality. Over time, you build a habit of finding more accurate and balanced thinking.
- EXAMPLE: Original thought: *"If I make one mistake, I've failed."* Reframe: *"Everyone makes mistakes—one doesn't erase all my effort."*

3. The STOP Technique

- WHAT IS IT: **S**top, **T**ake a breath, **O**bserve what's happening, **P**roceed with intention.
- WHY IT HELPS: This is a mental reset. It interrupts the spiral and grounds you long enough to choose a different response.
- EXAMPLE: You feel yourself spiraling before a meeting. STOP. Take a deep breath. Notice your tension. Then choose to speak slowly and stay grounded.



exercises cont...

4. Thought Defusion

- WHAT IS IT: Do something to detach from the thought—say it in a silly voice, sing it, or repeat it out loud until it sounds absurd.
- WHY IT HELPS: This breaks the illusion that every thought is serious or true. It creates mental distance from the emotion behind the thought.
- EXAMPLE: You keep thinking: *"I'm not good enough."* Say it in a cartoon voice or repeat it 10 times fast. Notice how much less power it has.

5. 5-Minute Rule

- WHAT IS IT: Give yourself 5 minutes to think about it—then redirect your focus.
- WHY IT HELPS: It keeps you from obsessing. It gives you permission to think, but within boundaries. Over time, your brain learns not to fixate.
- EXAMPLE: You're overanalyzing a conversation. Set a timer: 5 minutes to review it. Then shift to something active like tidying or walking.

Emotional Regulation: Managing Reactions

Emotional regulation is your ability to stay in control of how you respond—even when your emotions feel big, uncomfortable, or overwhelming. Whether you're dealing with anger, trauma triggers, mood swings, or stress, these tools help you pause, soothe, and choose how to respond instead of letting emotions run the show.

1. TIP Skill

- WHAT IS IT: **T** = Change your temperature (cold water, ice). **I** = Do brief intense exercise. **P** = Practice paced breathing.
- WHY IT HELPS: Calms your nervous system quickly by acting directly on your body.
- EXAMPLE: You feel like snapping. Use cold compress, jump in place, then breathe slowly. Your body starts to settle.

2. Opposite Action

- WHAT IS IT: Do the opposite of what the emotion urges you to do.
- WHY IT HELPS: It breaks the loop of reinforcing negative states.
- EXAMPLE: You want to isolate when sad. Instead, get up and call someone or go for a walk.



exercises cont...

3. Name It to Tame It

- WHAT IS IT: Label the emotion you're feeling: *'I'm anxious.'* *'I'm sad.'*
- WHY IT HELPS: Naming activates your thinking brain and reduces emotional intensity.
- EXAMPLE: You feel off and tense. You say: *"I'm anxious."* It helps you step out of the emotion.

4. Urge Surfing

- WHAT IS IT: Visualize the urge like a wave: rising, peaking, then falling.
- WHY IT HELPS: Most urges fade if you ride them out instead of acting.
- EXAMPLE: You want to lash out or avoid. Picture a wave and breathe through it. It passes.

5. Self-Validation

- WHAT IS IT: Instead of judging yourself, acknowledge your feeling: *"It makes sense I feel this way."*
- WHY IT HELPS: Calms the inner system and makes space for healing.
- EXAMPLE: You feel ashamed. You remind yourself: *"Anyone would feel this. It's okay."*

Behavioral Regulation: Managing Actions & Urges

Behavioral regulation is about resisting the urge to act on habits or compulsions that feel automatic. These might include perfectionistic routines, OCD-like checking or cleaning behaviors, or impulsive reactions to stress. The tools below help interrupt these patterns and teach your brain to respond with intention instead of defaulting to automatic behavior.

1. Delay the Urge

- WHAT IS IT: Set a timer for 10 minutes before acting.
- WHY IT HELPS: Most urges fade if you delay. It builds impulse control.
- EXAMPLE: Urge to check the lock? Wait 10 minutes. Often, it passes.

2. Competing Response Technique

- WHAT IS IT: Do something physically or mentally opposite of the urge.
- WHY IT HELPS: Replaces the habit and rewires the brain.
- EXAMPLE: Urge to pick skin? Clench fists or use a fidget item. Replaces the behavior.

exercises cont...

3. Habit Loop Awareness

WHAT IS IT: Identify the Cue → Routine → Reward cycle.
WHY IT HELPS: Once you understand the pattern, you can change it.
EXAMPLE: Cue: stress. Routine: clean. Reward: relief. Now change the routine.

4. Exposure + Response Prevention (ERP-lite)

WHAT IS IT: Face the trigger without doing the compulsion.
WHY IT HELPS: Builds tolerance and reduces compulsions.
EXAMPLE: Normally check stove 3x. Try once—and walk away.

5. Replacement Behavior

WHAT IS IT: Have a healthy behavior ready to use instead.
WHY IT HELPS: Practice rewires old patterns into new ones.
EXAMPLE: Instead of biting nails, chew gum or squeeze a stress ball.

Grounding & Presence: Anchoring to the Moment

Grounding brings you back to the present—especially when you're stuck in a memory, overwhelmed, or disconnected. These tools help you re-engage your senses and calm your system so you can feel safe and in control.

1. 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding

WHAT IS IT: List 5 things you see, 4 you feel, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, 1 you taste.
WHY IT HELPS: Focuses your brain on the physical world, not thoughts.
EXAMPLE: You're spiraling. You name objects around you and reconnect to the moment.

2. Box Breathing

WHAT IS IT: Inhale 4, hold 4, exhale 4, hold 4.
WHY IT HELPS: Slows breathing and activates calm.
EXAMPLE: Feeling panicked? Do this for 60 seconds. Your system starts to reset.

3. Anchoring Phrase

WHAT IS IT: Repeat: *"I am safe. This is not the past. I am here now."*
WHY IT HELPS: Separates present from trauma memories.
EXAMPLE: You're triggered. This phrase reminds you: you're no longer in danger.



exercises cont...

4. **Visualization Exercise**

WHAT IS IT: Picture a calming place in detail.

WHY IT HELPS: Your brain calms down, even if your environment is stressful.

EXAMPLE: Close your eyes. Imagine a lake, ocean, or peaceful room. Stay there mentally for 30–60 seconds.

5. **Sensory Reset**

WHAT IS IT: Use strong sensory input to re-engage your body.

WHY IT HELPS: Snaps you out of mental overload.

EXAMPLE: Splash cold water, use essential oils, or hold something textured. It grounds you fast.